

My name is Jennifer Farrell, I live in Essex, Connecticut. I fully support HB 5372 An Act Concerning Dyslexia Instruction Offered in Teacher Preparation Programs.

My family exemplifies why this important legislation must be passed. Both of my children attend our local public schools, and are dyslexic. My older daughter, Kate was not identified as dyslexic until she was fourteen years old. Although school personnel knew from Kate's first grade year on that she had a significant learning difference, the district had no specialist who could properly identify and provide effective intervention for dyslexic students. This caused immense personal and educational stress for my daughter. It wasn't until our district agreed to have Kate evaluated by a well-qualified dyslexia specialist from Learning House in Guilford, that a diagnosis was made and appropriate instruction and interventions could be given. We were surprised to find that the only viable option for one-to-one dyslexia intervention for Kate during school hours, was via Skype with a dyslexia tutor located in Mississippi. So, for almost two years, our district paid for a specialist based in Mississippi to provide services for my daughter. The good news is that Kate made incredible progress with the specialist, and closed many of the gaps in her reading skills. She now reads on grade level. Successful intervention completely transformed Kate. She is now confident in her school work, consistently makes the high honor roll, and is involved in many school and community activities.

My younger daughter, Lily, has had an easier path, but hers has not been without challenges as well. Again, because of a lack of trained specialists, our district was forced to use specialists from Learning House to identify Lily's dyslexia. Since Lily's diagnosis almost five years ago, I am happy to report that our district has sent several special educators to receive the initial 30-hour course in the Orton-Gillingham method of instruction. However, because teaching dyslexic learners requires educators to have advanced knowledge of explicit, systematic, multisensory reading interventions, our district contracts with Blueprint Learning to consult with Lily's special educator to ensure that Lily's program is effective in meeting her needs. Lily too, is a success story. Although she continues to work on building her fluency, she has gone from being several grade levels behind her peers in reading, to being on grade level. She is even confident enough in her reading skills to be a part of her schools' morning on-air news program. I applaud the Region 4 schools for training

professionals within the district and hiring professionals outside of the district to ensure that Lily continues to make progress. Both Kate and Lily have benefitted from Region 4's ongoing commitment to providing effective reading instruction.

Finally, I am a Connecticut educator, who currently holds both the Reading Specialist and Reading Consultant certifications. I completed my Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in reading at the University of Connecticut, and went on to Southern Connecticut State University to pursue the credits needed for my Reading Consultant certification. Sadly, even with my qualifications, I was completely unprepared to help dyslexic students in Connecticut, including my own daughters. During my graduate studies, I received absolutely no instruction about the identification of dyslexia or the most effective instruction methods for dyslexic students. One in five Connecticut students is dyslexic. Our institutions of higher education must comply with current Connecticut laws and provide instruction on structured literacy to those pursuing reading certifications from the State of Connecticut. A lack of trained, local professionals has been costly for Region 4, and cost my older daughter precious years of the specific instruction she needed.

HB5372 will ensure minimum standards for knowledge and practice within Connecticut institutions of higher education. School districts will no longer have to look outside their own staff for qualified professionals, and students, like my daughters, will reap the immense benefits of well-qualified teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jennifer Farrell